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Letter dated 20 June 2002 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Shara, at today's 4556th meeting of the Security Council in connection with the item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would circulate the text of the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mikhail **Wehbe**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 20 June 2002 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Arabic]

Mr. Secretary-General,
Members of the Security Council,

It is a pleasure for me to be among you in the Security Council following the near-unanimous international support for Syria's membership of the Security Council until the end of next year.

I wish at the outset to convey our gratitude to all who supported our candidature for Council membership in appreciation of Syria's constructive role in this international Organization and because Syria has always been at the forefront of States that have made respect for resolutions of international legitimacy a central pillar of their foreign policy. We in Syria see the United Nations as a sacred institution that is above criticism and slander. Our awareness of the importance of the Security Council, of its key role in the international arena and of the tasks entrusted to it in the Charter has made us — along with other peoples around the world that have suffered as a result of occupation and aggression — look to the Council to play an effective role in the peaceful settlement of international disputes on the basis of the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and on the basis of Council resolutions.

I listened very carefully to the briefing by the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on the situation in the Middle East. I share his grave concern at the fact that the crisis has reached a point at which it poses a threat to peace and security, not only in the Middle East but throughout the world. Since the deterioration of the situation in our region, we have noted the Security Council's willingness to take up the situation in the Middle East. The Council has adopted many resolutions, but the situation has continued to deteriorate, and has reached a point that is unprecedented in the Arab-Israeli dispute. This is because of Israel's refusal to implement United Nations resolutions, which it has never taken seriously.

As members know, in the June 1967 war Israel occupied the Syrian Golan, the West Bank including East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Sinai. The Security Council adopted its resolution 242 (1967) to address the consequences of that war. Ever since then, all international efforts to implement that resolution have failed. Conflict and bloodshed have continued. The prospects for a comprehensive peace in the region have grown ever dimmer. A great deal has been said about the reasons for that war, but the most remarkable statements about the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan are in the memoirs of the then Minister of Defence of Israel, Moshe Dayan, published in the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* on 29 April 1997. He wrote:

> "Syria had not intended to attack Israel in 1967. It did not attack our farmers in the kibbutzim; we provoked Syria. That is the fact of it. We declared war on Syria under pressure from the kibbutzim, which coveted the land of the Golan and whose interests coincided with those of the commander of the Israeli army in the north, David Ben Eliezer, who did not want to see the Israeli army achieve astonishing victories in the Sinai and the West Bank while he stood idle".

Israel did not stop at occupying Arab lands. It went on to settle them. It attempted to Judaize them and to impose its laws on them in contravention of United Nations resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention. The latest Israeli attempt to evade resolution 242 (1967) — which forms an essential part of the terms of reference of the peace process that came out of the 1991 Madrid Conference — took the form of an op-ed-article published in *The New York Times* on 9 June 2002 by the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, and a letter distributed by the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations on 14 June 2002. Both were intended to destroy the very foundations of the peace process. Israel wants to enjoy the fruits of its aggression by seizing parts of Arab lands occupied in June 1967, even though it realizes that, a priori, resolution 242 (1967) articulates the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of the territory of others by force, and that genuine peace with the Arabs cannot be obtained with anything less than the return of all Arab lands occupied in 1967. That is what has kept the conflict ablaze to this very day.

In March 1991, the first Bush Administration set in motion an initiative to attain comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The then Secretary of State, Mr. James Baker, made many trips to the region with a view to concluding an agreement between the parties concerned on the terms of reference of the peace process. Syria's acceptance of the United States initiative paved the way for the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference in November 1991. Israel was embarrassed and reluctantly agreed to attend the Conference. Although talks on the various tracks have continued for the past decade, peace has not been attained because the Israeli side has sought to fulfil the desire of Yitzhak Shamir, then Prime Minister of Israel, who said that he would make sure that the talks went on for 10 years without a result.

The events of the past decade have shown that Israel is not serious about attaining peace with the Arabs. Today, the Sharon Government persists in its strategy of killing, destruction and massacre with a view to forcing the Palestinian side to surrender. In September 2000, Sharon, then leader of the opposition, made an intentionally provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in flagrant defiance of the feelings of Palestinians in particular and of Arabs and Muslims in general. That was the spark that ignited the Palestinian intifadah and led to the unprecedented deterioration of the situation in the occupied territories that we see today. That deterioration reached its nadir with the Jenin refugee camp massacre, which will not be forgotten by history, even though the Security Council has neglected it to date.

Faced with Israel's ongoing strategy of killing, destruction, siege, detention and continued occupation of Arab lands, faced with Israeli insistence on destroying the peace process, and faced with the despair and frustration of the Palestinian people, all of us might well wonder what alternatives remain for the defenceless Palestinian people.

No reasonable person could agree to the killing of civilians. However, the way out of this cycle of violence cannot lie in continued killings and acts of destruction, or in the construction of racist security walls. The way out lies in an end to occupation and the implementation of the peace strategy born of the Madrid Conference, as enshrined in the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Beirut Summit in March.

At that time, Syria played a key role in working to obtain Arab unanimity for the adoption of that initiative. It was clear from the initiative that full Israeli withdrawal, to the lines of 4 June 1967, from all Arab territory occupied in 1967, as well as the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, were prerequisites for peace between the Arab States and Israel, as were security guarantees for all parties in the region.

The Arab initiative enjoyed wide international support. It was supported by the United States of America, the Russian Federation and the European Union. It was also supported by the "Quartet", as expressed in the statement issued at Madrid on 10 April 2002, which welcomed the initiative as a significant contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive peace encompassing Syria and Lebanon. Furthermore, the Foreign Ministers of the States members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, in a statement issued at Durban on 29 April 2002, welcomed the Arab peace initiative adopted by the Arab Summit in Beirut. They urged the Security Council to endeavour to build upon that initiative with a view to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The road towards peace is clear. The holding of an international conference requires clear bases and terms of reference such as have already been adopted by the international community. Furthermore, the strenuous efforts made over the past decade must not be in vain. Talks must be resumed from the point at which they left off. A timetable must be set out for the implementation of the objectives of the Conference, with a view to obtaining a comprehensive peace in the region. Otherwise, we will have to wait another 10 years — years of violence, destruction and chaos that will be very difficult to control.

True peace in our region will not be obtained unless it is a comprehensive peace. Proof of this is that Egypt — the major Arab State that signed a peace treaty with Israel 23 years ago — has not achieved peace to this day. It continues to toil with its Arab brethren and the rest of the international community to obtain a just and comprehensive peace. This clearly shows that, unless it is comprehensive, peace will not result in security or stability for any of the parties to the dispute.

Thank you.